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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001333

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SUBJECT: UN ACTING SRSG ROSS MOUNTAIN DISCUSSES IRAQ WITH  
PRM PDAS GREENE

REF: AMMAN 1120

Classified By: A/DCM Doug Silliman per 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary and comment: In a February 16 meeting, UN SRSG, a.i. Ross Mountain told PRM PDAS Greene that Special Advisor Brahimi's "good" visit to Iraq, a February 14 security mission to Basra and "a change of mood in CPA" were helpful for the UN's reentry to Iraq. Mountain hopes to resume UN operations in Basra soon and believes that UN Headquarters' security concerns include both real and perceived threats. Mountain believes greater consultation with Iraqi authorities is required for development of the UN's strategic plan. The UN will present detailed funding needs at the Feb. 28-29 Iraq Fund meeting but is unlikely to issue a new appeal. With USD 300 million on-hand, the UN's real challenge is to implement programs under current security conditions. Mountain's forward-leaning position on UN reentry to Iraq does not match the pessimistic assessments provided by UNSECOORD and we are not confident that his arguments will outweigh UN NY's security concerns. End summary and comment.

2. (U) PRM PDAS Richard Greene met UN SRSG, a.i. for Iraq Ross Mountain on February 16, on the margins of a UNHCR meeting on Iraqi refugees, returnees and IDPs (UNHCR meeting reported septel). UNAMI Senior Adviser for IDPs John Pace, UN strategic planning officer Michael Dalton and UNAMI humanitarian affairs officer Maura Lynch also attended the meeting, as did USAID Assistant Administrator Bill Garvelink, PRM/ANE officials Larry Bartlett and Andy Wyllie and Regional Refcoord Joan Polaschik (notetaker).

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Current UN Operations in Iraq  
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3. (C) Repeating a familiar refrain, Mountain told Greene it is now a question of when, not if, the United Nations will return to Iraq. With UN Special Advisor Brahimi's "good" visit to Iraq, a February 14 security mission to Basra, agreement for the UN plane to fly into Iraq and a "change of mood in CPA," Mountain characterized recent events as "helpful" for the UN's reentry to Iraq. Based on the February 14 security mission, Mountain hopes that the UN will be able to resume operations in Basra "soon." The UN has a significant number of staff prepositioned in Kuwait and Amman who could conduct "in and out" missions to Iraq once security conditions improve. Mountain (who had just spent three weeks in Amman and Kuwait) said he expects to spend the majority of his time in the region although UNAMI headquarters will remain in Cyprus.

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UN Role in Political Transition  
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4. (C) Noting that UN Special Advisor Brahimi was scheduled to brief UNSYG Annan in a few days, Mountain told Greene that "some accommodation had been reached" during Brahimi's recent mission to assess elections prospects in Iraq. Because "it is clear that elections will not be held before the transfer of sovereignty," Mountain said the real question is how to deal with the transition period between July 1 and elections. While the transition period before elections could be difficult, Mountain doubted that the Iraqi people or Iraq's neighbors would support a delay in the transfer of sovereignty.

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UN Security Concerns  
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5. (C) Mountain commented that UN security concerns include both real and perceived security threats; his biggest challenge is to change perceptions in New York. He predicted that the UN would be able to reestablish operations in Basra and Irbil "soon" although the February 1 attack on Kurdish party offices in Irbil delayed UN plans for a security assessment there. Security in Baghdad, he said, remains "a real problem." Mountain also expressed concern that the security situation could worsen after the June 30 transfer of authority in Iraq.

16. (C) Mountain acknowledged that the UN was not making adequate use of its national staff under the current security restrictions. While some UN agencies follow the spirit rather than the letter of the security regulations, other UN agencies have ordered their staff not to leave home. Greene urged Mountain to make maximum use of UN national staff, especially in capacity building for Iraqi ministries before the June 30 transition.

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UN Strategic Plan  
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17. (C) Mountain said that further work needs to be done on the UN's strategic plan for Iraq, particularly in the areas of coordination with Iraqi authorities and cash-flow analysis. While the UN had already begun formal consultations with the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, Mountain believes the UN must expand its strategic planning to line ministries and also build on existing consultations with CPA.

Pressed by Greene to identify immediate funding needs, Mountain responded that the UN has roughly USD 300 million in cash on-hand but will require USD 900 million for food assistance in the coming year, as well as a "good chunk" of funds for up-front program needs such as software and other crucial support purchases. Mountain pledged that the UN would have more precise figures ready by the February 28-29 Iraq Trust Fund meeting in Abu Dhabi. However, the UN was unlikely to issue a new appeal for Iraq as it has sufficient funds on-hand. The real question, according to Mountain, is the UN's ability to implement programs.

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Humanitarian Priorities  
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18. (C) Noting that the lack of solid information makes it difficult to prioritize humanitarian needs in Iraq, Mountain said that health services, electricity output, and food basket distributions remain problematic. In the longer term, Mountain is concerned that an appropriate social safety net is constructed along with efforts to monetize the Iraqi economy.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Mountain's forward-leaning position on UN plans to return to Iraq and resume assistance activities does not match the more pessimistic security assessments presented by Amman-based UNSECOORD officials (ref). While we appreciate his enthusiastic advocacy for an early return to Iraq, we are not confident that his arguments will outweigh security concerns.

110. (U) PDAS Greene cleared this message.

111. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.  
GNEHM